

IMPACT STUDY

Troup County School System, Georgia

CHALLENGE: A 2015 instructional practice review revealed the need for a shift from a teacher-centered approach to student-centered learning that would enable application of knowledge in real-world situations and enhance college and career readiness.

SOLUTION: The Troup County School System (TCSS) partnered with *HMH Professional Services* and the *International Center for Leadership in Education® (ICLE)* to develop a robust five-year professional learning plan for TCSS teachers.

RESULTS: From the first semester of 2016–2017 to the first semester of 2017–2018, discipline referrals in schools across the district decreased by 27%.

THE CHALLENGE

Instructional practice reviews conducted in the fall of 2015 revealed that Troup County educators were delivering teacher-centered instruction; a concurrent survey of students expressed a need for student-centered learning that would offer access to more challenging, relevant assignments and help them apply their knowledge to real-world situations. Further research also showed that the majority of teachers did not have the support necessary to help students meet and exceed the rapidly increasing requirements to be successful in college and career. District leaders and administrators resolved to equip teachers with instructional leadership capacity, tools, and resources to deliver a more rigorous curriculum (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

THE SOLUTION

In the spring of 2015, the Troup County School System (TCSS), HMH®, and ICLE (a division of HMH Professional Services) collaborated to develop a five-year comprehensive professional learning plan for TCSS teachers and leaders. The team first assessed perceptions of learning and instructional practices, developed and articulated district strategy for instructional excellence, and amplified a shared vision across the entire TCSS community. Specifically, the HMH/ICLE team worked with the district to build capacity in five key areas:

- Establishing a positive vision and culture
- Increasing rigor and relevance in instruction
- Monitoring progress using data
- Building instructional leadership capacity
- Implementing *READ 180 Universal*, *System 44*, and *iRead*

During the 2016–2017 school year, TCSS, HMH, and ICLE continued to create a common understanding of instructional excellence and strategies for all staff to use in daily practice. TCSS also received building-level executive coaching to build strong instructional leadership capacity that supports teachers in a collaborative manner.

QUICK FACTS



STAFF



K-12 STUDENTS



SCHOOLS

PROGRAMS: **READ 180® UNIVERSAL, SYSTEM 44®, iREAD®**

SERVICES: **Program Implementation Services, Instructional Coaching, ICLE Rigor/Relevance Framework, ICLE Executive Coaching**

SCHOOL YEAR: **2016–2017**

THE RESULTS

In the first year of a five-year partnership, TCSS, ICLE, and the HMH teams collaborated to build a positive vision and culture across the district. ICLE and HMH provided comprehensive instructional coaching for the implementation of HMH literacy programs, progress monitoring using data, and leadership support to increase rigor and relevance across the district. Job-embedded professional learning and executive coaching helped TCSS build capacity for accelerating student achievement.

PARTNERSHIP ELEMENTS



Establishing a Positive Vision and Culture

During the 2015–2016 school year, TCSS began the critical first step of building awareness around the need for changes in leadership, instruction, and implementation. ICLE leaders helped the district to establish a shared vision for rigorous and relevant learning for all students. They delivered a series of presentations to stakeholders, faculty, and the community on improving student performance for the sake of both their students and their regional economy and what changes were needed in the instructional program. Leaders from ICLE and TCSS then met with and presented to various community, business, and economic development groups to share the same message.

TCSS and ICLE worked collaboratively to establish a positive culture within schools and among the greater community. A culture of high expectations and positive relationships has both human and economic benefits, both to individual students and the economic future of the region. TCSS and ICLE worked together and provided support as a community to create a collective will to change schools and improve student performance.



Increasing Rigor and Relevance in Instruction

At the beginning of the partnership, TCSS and ICLE developed a shared expectation that instructional practices must be more rigorous and relevant for all students. In the first year, TCSS adopted ICLE's Rigor/Relevance Framework® to guide its efforts to improve instruction and student performance.

During 2016–2017, K–12 teachers participated in a three-day hands-on course to help them create a more effective learning environment. They used the Framework to establish an aligned and focused approach for increasing student achievement and as a guide to developing more rigorous and relevant learning experiences. The *Using Rigor and Relevance to Create Effective Instruction Handbook* provided actionable solutions for putting this learning into practice in the classroom.

In 2017–2018, teachers will participate in three professional development days to deepen their skills for providing rigorous learning opportunities with an emphasis on integrating literacy across all content areas and collaborating to examine student formative assessment data.



Monitoring Progress Using Data

In 2015, ICLE began conducting research on literacy levels required in the workplace nationwide. Comparing these requirements to the literacy levels of graduating students in Troup County, the team was able to identify a readiness gap in what students would need for success in the workplace and in society.

To take their research to the next level, the ICLE team administered a comprehensive Instructional Practices Assessment in all 19 district schools, which indicated the need to raise academic rigor and real-world relevance system-wide. In addition, the ICLE team employed WE Surveys™—online surveys that ask students and faculty to share their perceptions anonymously about the learning environment, quality of instruction, and leadership in a school or district. The surveys showed a clear gap within the district: students saw less relevance in the instructional programs than teachers believed to exist. Identifying this gap has been crucial in providing the benchmarks needed to measure growth over time, gaining buy-in among stakeholders for the initiative, and showing the transformation in culture, teaching, and learning that has begun in TCSS.



Building Instructional Leadership Capacity

In order to effectively deliver more rigorous learning experiences in their buildings, all Troup County principals are taking part in executive coaching to develop and build instructional leadership capacity. Coaching supports the district-wide effort to develop a common understanding of rigorous and relevant instruction and the imperative to monitor progress to accelerate student growth.

During 2016–2017, four days of executive coaching from ICLE helped all principals and central administrators develop the skill sets to make the transition from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning. ICLE executive coaches also focused on building the capacity of teacher leaders in each school, working with the principal, assistant principals, and teacher leaders to focus the entire building around Quad D instruction.

In the new school year, executive coaching will continue developing leadership skills for rigorous and relevant learning. ICLE executive coaches will work closely with principals on best practices for providing articulate feedback based on evidence and data.



Implementation of iRead, System 44, and READ 180 Universal

In 2016, the district moved forward with the implementation of *iRead*, *System 44*, and *READ 180 Universal*. *iRead* was implemented at five new sites across the district (adding to four sites that had begun implementation the previous year), *System 44* at 15 sites, and *READ 180* at 18 sites. ICLE’s school-level executive coaches assisted in monitoring successful implementation of the programs through monthly data review meetings with district leadership. Teachers participated in ongoing professional development through three afterschool cadres, receiving support in interpreting classroom data and applying the data to differentiate instruction and support students.

During the 2017–2018 school year, based on the district’s Lexile® study and first-year results with the three programs, ICLE is providing a major professional learning focus on literacy. Reading and Writing Across Content Areas is a three-day workshop broken out by grade level and content area that equips teachers and leaders with tools, strategies, and techniques to infuse reading and writing into content-focused teaching and learning. This professional learning has helped the district comply with ESSA literacy requirements and equipped teachers and leaders with practical approaches to incorporate reading and writing—and higher levels of rigor and relevance—into all curriculum areas.

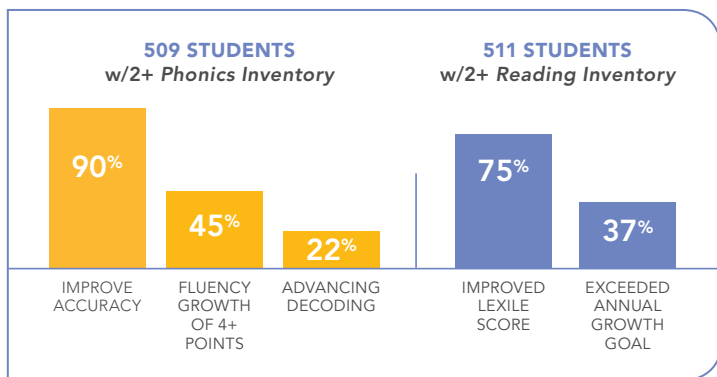
FIGURE 1 Our Research-Based Coaching Model for Teachers



THE RESULTS

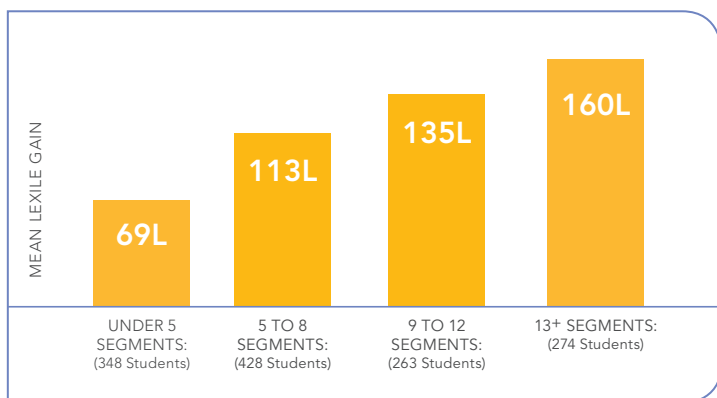
In their partnership with ICLE and HMH Professional Services, TCSS is developing a sustainable professional learning system to provide comprehensive support for district leaders, teachers, and students. In the first year of the five-year partnership, professional learning services have supported successful district-wide implementation of intensive reading intervention using a blended approach for *iRead*, *READ 180* Universal, and *System 44*; job-embedded and personalized coaching for teachers and leaders; and increased rigor and relevance in the classroom.

FIGURE 2 Overview TCSS Test Results for System 44 Students



This chart demonstrates the achievement rates of students using *System 44*: a total of 509 students across 15 schools completed a minimum of two *Phonics Inventory*[®] assessments at least eight weeks apart and at least 20 software sessions. *System 44* provides explicit instruction in phonics, comprehension, and writing with the goal of helping students master the foundational reading skills required for achievement in literacy. The *Phonics Inventory* identifies students who are pre-, beginning, or developing decoders and need instruction in these foundational reading skills before advancing to a Tier 2 intervention such as *READ 180*. At the beginning of the 2016–2017 school year, 11 *System 44* students were classified as pre-decoders, 263 students were beginning decoders, 235 were developing, and 0 were advancing. By the time of the end-of-year *Phonics Inventory* assessment, the students had made progress in mastering the foundational reading skills: 8 *System 44* students were classified as pre-decoders, 211 students were beginning decoders, 194 were developing, and 96 were advancing.

FIGURE 3 Lexile growth relative to program completion for students using *READ 180* Universal



The *READ 180* Universal analysis of student achievement results included a total of 1,313 students across 18 schools in Grades 4 to 9 for the 2016–2017 school year. These students completed at least 20 *READ 180* software sessions and two *Reading Inventory*[®] assessments at least eight weeks apart. Overall, *READ 180* students experienced an average fall-to-spring Lexile gain of 116L, from 600L to 716L, with 81% of students experiencing a Lexile gain and 60% of students meeting or exceeding expected growth for the year. Analyses revealed there was a relationship between the number of segments completed and Lexile growth. Students who completed 13 or more software segments (5 to 15 days per segment) experienced an average fall-to-spring Lexile gain of 160L whereas students who completed under five segments experienced an average fall-to-spring Lexile gain of 69L. Research indicates that students advance most quickly when they use *READ 180* instructional software daily.

“ We have now completed day 3 of the Rigor/Relevance training and I could not be more excited. As I have visited classrooms this week, I have witnessed some of the strategies emphasized. . . . **Our students are engaged and excited about learning!** Our school is successful at hitting the achievement mark, and I am convinced that **by incorporating strategies from Rigor/Relevance training, we are going to be even more successful** as we produce critical thinkers for tomorrow. ”

—TROUP ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

CONCLUSION

Beginning in the 2015–2016 school year, Troup County School System, the International Center for Leadership in Education, and the HMH Professional Services team began collaborating to build a positive vision and culture, increase rigor and relevance, and provide comprehensive support for TCSS teachers. The resulting sustainable professional learning program includes

- instructional support for the implementation of HMH literacy intervention programs,
- progress monitoring using data, and
- leadership support to increase rigor and relevance across the district.

Through personalized and job-embedded professional learning offerings for teachers and school and district leaders, TCSS has been able to build capacity for accelerating student achievement, as demonstrated in highly encouraging data: Graduation rates have increased by 6.6 percentage points over the past three years to 78% and discipline referrals across the district decreased 27% from the first semester of the 2016–2017 school year to the first semester of the 2017–2018 school year.

TCSS leaders and teachers are continuing to develop their collaborative partnership with ICLE and HMH Professional Services in order to meet their goal of educating “all students in a challenging and safe learning environment so they will become productive citizens in a diverse and changing world.” Troup County has positioned itself for long-term sustained improvement by creating a culture to support school improvement and putting in place actionable data at the student and classroom levels.

APPENDIX

District Characteristics

Troup County School System (TCSS) serves the citizens of Hogansville, LaGrange, West Point, and Troup County. Nineteen schools, including THINC College and Career Academy, house approximately 12,200 students in Grades pre-K through 12.

There are three high schools, three middle schools, eleven elementary schools, one college and career academy, and one alternative school.

TCSS has 1,825 employees and 73.05% of the staff hold advanced degrees. In the district, 11% of students receive gifted services and 8.6% of the student population are students with disabilities.

The mission of the Troup County School System is to educate all students in a challenging and safe learning environment so they will become productive citizens in a diverse and changing world. The district goals are to: ensure all students achieve at their highest level of academic performance; provide a safe, secure, and wholesome learning environment; engage all students, staff, families, businesses, and the community in the educational process; and maximize efficiency and productivity in pursuit of the system's mission.

REFERENCES

Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2016). *Coherence: The right drivers in action for schools, districts, and systems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

THE HMH RESEARCH MISSION STATEMENT

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